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# The role of the arts and gifting in the restorative process

*'Art does not reproduce the visible;  
rather, it makes visible'*  
- Paul Klee

Throughout history, the arts have been targeted by totalitarian regimes. The arts offer us an opportunity for escapism from the everyday but they also reflect life in all its confusion and pain. Artistic expression often acts as a commentary and reflection on life; it can ask difficult questions and provide a mechanism for people to express their innermost thoughts and feelings. This is perhaps why the arts are feared or underfunded by governments who do not wish to be questioned. A recent article in the *New York Times*<sup>26</sup> explores this in more detail.

As an artist who has worked in community settings for over twenty years, I have observed this through my own experience as well as through leading workshops with others: the ability of the arts (whatever the art form) to challenge, inspire and offer us an opportunity to explore issues in our lives and enable us to see a potential for change. When I am working with others, I often refer to the work of painter Howard Hodgkin, who says of his work, 'I paint representational pictures of emotional situations.'<sup>27</sup> He has also said, 'A lot of people ... are afraid of pictures which have visible emotions in them. They feel calmer in front of pictures which are placid.'<sup>28</sup> His abstract paintings with such names as 'In Paris with you,' 'One damn thing after another' or 'Happy night' capture the essence and emotion of an event or place — the emotion often being too great to be contained so that Hodgkin extends the painting outwards to include the frame.<sup>29</sup> Art can be a powerful tool, whether it be literature, music, performance, visual or design work.

When I was offered a sessional role with the Oxfordshire Youth Offending Service<sup>30</sup> (Oxford, England) in 2001, it seemed natural to me to use the arts as a way of working. Shortly afterwards my manager, Peter Wallis,<sup>31</sup> sent me on a week-long restorative justice conference facilitator training course with Thames Valley Police. This proved to be a week that shaped the rest of my life.

My first case was working with a young person who had stolen from a large national store. It was her first offence; she was embarrassed and remorseful about what she had done and wanted to make amends. She had stolen the item as a birthday gift for her brother. The young person was interested in beauty and so we looked at the proportions of the face and the body, created a mood board and designed two masks which expressed how she felt about what she had done. Once they were complete, I was not sure what to do with them. Co-creating the artwork with her enabled conversations about the offence, but at the end of the process I felt strongly that she should not keep the masks; our work together had been carried out as part of a court order which was aimed at enabling her to make reparation for the harm caused. I discussed it with a colleague and the most obvious course of action seemed to be to present it to the store (the people harmed — the victims) as a 'reparative' gift. At this stage, it never occurred to me that we were proposing anything unusual.

On contacting the company, I learned that the store security officer had been disturbed by the experience of arresting the young person as she had been so distressed. He and the store manager expressed a desire to meet with us as a way of working through the incident.

The young person felt unable to attend a joint meeting with the store but was happy for me and my manager, Pete Wallis, to present it to them on her behalf. The store manager and the security officer were delighted with the gift in terms of its 'professional' looking presentation and the sentiments it expressed. The framed masks were hung in the store's staff room. As a result of the gifting, the young person's nationwide ban from the store

<sup>26</sup> [https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/06/opinion/why-authoritarians-attack-the-arts.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/06/opinion/why-authoritarians-attack-the-arts.html?_r=0) (accessed 12.6.2017)  
<sup>27</sup> <https://www.artsy.net/article/editorial-representational-pictures-of-emotional-situations-howard-hodgkins> (accessed 14.6.2017)

<sup>28</sup> <https://howard-hodgkin.com/gallery> (accessed 14.6.2017)

<sup>29</sup> <https://howard-hodgkin.com/artwork> (accessed 13.6.2017)

<sup>30</sup> See <https://www.gov.uk/youth-offending-teamfor> more information regarding youth offending services/ teams (accessed 14.6.2017)

<sup>31</sup> See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Youth\\_Offending\\_Team](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Youth_Offending_Team) for a brief biography of Pete Wallis (accessed 14.6.2017)

was lifted and they said they would be happy to meet with her anytime. I relayed this message to the young person and her mother who were relieved at the restorative outcome. This was the first time I had witnessed the power of a piece of artwork to act as a conduit for communication between two parties in a conflict even when one of them was not present.



Professor Jayne Wallace (2007), jeweller and researcher, explores this concept in some of her work. For me another form of intimacy arises from the role often played by jewellery as a symbol of self, of identity and of inter-personal relationships. Functioning in this role the object becomes a conduit to transport us to other times, places and people and also a container for our feelings about that associated 'other'.<sup>32</sup>

This case became a model for the way I would work with youth offending service clients for the next six years and beyond, into my current restorative work. The model has changed, been adapted for different contexts and developed over the years, but has essentially remained the same.

From this first case, other gifts were created (including music, visual art, craft and writing) and sometimes given directly by the person responsible (the offender) to the person harmed (the victim) as part of a joint restorative

meeting. The artwork on these occasions acted as a physical visualisation of the restorative process and as such became a tool for the meeting. One criticism of the restorative process, and particularly the joint meeting, is that it requires a level of emotional literacy and articulation from participants. In my experience, an artwork can act as a focal point and

Handing over the gift of the 'masks' to the store



assist in verbal communication during joint meetings. This is particularly useful when one or more of the participants finds it difficult to communicate verbally. For example, in a recent case, a sculpture of a tree was created by the person responsible for the persons he had harmed. The making of the tree became the three stages of restorative work; the roots were the facts of his offending, the trunk the consequences, whilst the leaves represented what he felt he and the people harmed might need in the future in order to move on from the incident of harm. We also worked with the persons harmed and co-created a collage of a tree exploring the same three stages. This was presented in the joint meeting alongside the person responsible's tree. (This case took two years to culminate in a joint restorative meeting due to its sensitive and complex nature and the person responsible's intermittent stays in custody.)

<sup>32</sup> <http://www.jaynewallace.com/gallery> (accessed 14.6.2017)

I was trained to use the formal police restorative conferencing script<sup>33</sup> which still forms the basis of the way in which I work with clients. As I have become more experienced as a restorative practitioner, I have moved away from the rigidity of the script but kept the structure of the questions which reflect the three main stages of the restorative process.

### **Facts**

What happened?

### **Consequences**

How have you been affected? Who else has been affected? Who do you think has been most affected?

### **Future**

What do you think you need to do now? What do you need in order to move on from here in a safer way? What do you think the other people need to move on from the situation of harm?

The six years I spent working with the youth offending service as part of a restorative justice team were transformative for me and ones which I will never forget as they mark the beginning of my artistic restorative journey. In 2007 I was offered a contract with an arts development agency and moved to the Shetland Islands in Scotland. Following my move, I met with the criminal justice social work team and Alyson Halcrow from the restorative justice project. Alyson invited me to give a presentation about my arts based restorative work. As a result, Alyson and I co-founded the space2face arts and restorative justice project, which was originally a partnership project between the two organisations that Alyson and I respectively worked for — the Community Mediation Team and Shetland Arts. Eight years on, and after trying out a number of different structural models, space2face is now an independent charitable organisation with a board of three trustees. The project continues to be managed by Alyson and myself whilst also maintaining a small pool of restoratively trained freelance artists who we contract on a case by case basis. This is a model that has worked well and suits the way in which self-employed artists work locally.

The original space2face project was formed to work within the same model of reparative gift giving developed with the Oxfordshire Youth Offending Service. Through working with Alyson and the team in Shetland, the model has expanded to reflect working in a different context (rural and remote) and within an independent rather than a statutory context. Our work now includes creative restorative group working, such as a project we ran for



<sup>33</sup> <http://www.iirp.edu/eforum-archive/4434-restorative-conference-facilitator-script> (accessed 14.6.2017)



two years with a group of teenage girls involved in cyber-bullying of one another. With this group, we used the arts and restorative circles as a means of talking about difficult issues. We also run training courses in using the arts as part of restorative processes and deliver training sessions in schools. Most recently, due to a number of self-referrals, we have started working with the person harmed first rather than the more usual restorative model of commencing work with the person responsible first.

Last year, Alyson and I visited (with prior consent) two people harmed who had received a reparative gift in a joint meeting from the person responsible for causing them harm. The gift was a garden bench which had been designed and made during the period of a year by the person responsible. We also met separately with the person responsible. The purpose of these meetings was to discover what meaning the gift had two years on. Whilst the gift had been received very positively and emotionally at the time, I wondered if the bench might be a constant negative reminder of the offence and so possibly be unhelpful in terms of recovery for the persons harmed.

I asked both the persons harmed and the person responsible the same questions and was surprised by some of their responses. There is not space here to detail all of their answers but here are a few.<sup>34</sup>

#### **From the persons harmed (a couple):**

*A lot of stuff hangs around the bench. The bench is 'a landmark,' a beacon.*

*When we were told that S [person responsible] was making a bench, it was the last thing that P [person harmed] wanted in the garden as it was a reminder of what had happened. Now it's gone full circle and P looks after it and puts it away in the winter.*

*The money S took was never the issue, it was the violation. The bench addressed that violation and regrets and gave us ways of dealing with it. The process and our acceptance of what he did has given him some dignity.*

*The bench replaced the pain and harmed caused.*



**From the person responsible:** The bench was 'a stepping stone ... a step in the right direction.

*Asked how, if at all, the gift of the bench had been reparative or restorative, he said,*

*It has. I don't know, it was just the bench and everything [restorative process]. Having meetings.*

*Of the entire restorative process, he added,*

*Doing this [restorative justice] is far harder than going to prison.*

Through our creative restorative journey with space2face, we have learned several key things that have become central tenets for our arts based restorative work.

- The unique value of the co-created artwork as a conduit for communication when it is inappropriate for the two parties to meet, or they choose not to.
- The importance of using artists who are working at a professional level and who are trained restoratively.
- It is vital that the artwork gift is of a high quality and finish.
- The power of presenting the artwork in a beautiful manner. For example, a painting professionally framed.
- The significance of giving away the finished artwork.

The last three points are significant in avoiding the potential for re-victimisation of the person harmed by presenting a poorly executed or finished gift of artwork, which might be viewed as disrespectful.

Earlier this year, I was awarded Arts and Humanities Research Council PhD funding to explore the potential of the co-created artefact to engender solidarity between participants in a restorative justice process. It was a privilege to commence this in October 2017 at Northumbria University, Newcastle, England. Howard Zehr (2014), a Professor of Restorative Justice and professional photographer, in 'The Art of Justice: A Reply to Brunilda Pali' considers the 'intersection between justice and the arts to be one of the most promising frontiers in the restorative justice field.' Through my doctoral studies, I am interested in moving beyond the 'intersection' and to investigate the possibilities for the making process to become the restorative process. ~

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<sup>34</sup> The quotes used with their permission